

The Chair by Xanthe



Story archived: <http://www.xanthe.org/the-chair/>

Story Notes:

This story is dedicated to my dear friend, Bluespirit. Happy Birthday, Bluespirit! I hope you have as much fun reading this story as I had writing it :-)

This story is set immediately after "The Siege Part 3", and before anything coming after that, simply because I haven't seen anything after that episode. So John is still a Major at this point.

This story hasn't been properly beta'd but I have pestered Bluespirit with lots of questions. Hopefully I haven't got anything badly wrong. This is my first Stargate: Atlantis story so be gentle with me!

This story is now available as part of an anthology of my stories published in zine form under the title Breaking the Rules from: <http://www.agentwithstyle.com/>

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Chapter 1 by Xanthe

Author's Notes:



Rodney McKay shifted restlessly in his bed, listening to the faint hum of the city reverberating around him. He had no idea why he couldn't sleep – god knows he was exhausted enough after the past week or so, having been forced to rise to one challenge after another in their recent confrontation with the Wraith. But now that the danger had passed, and he was finally able to collapse into bed, he suddenly found himself wide awake. Rodney thumped his fists into the mattress, willing himself to get some rest. He'd always slept perfectly soundly before the Atlantis mission, but ever since arriving in the city he'd found himself plagued by occasional bouts of insomnia. He told himself sternly that it was to be expected, considering the life he was leading now, with the constant threat from the Wraith and all the exciting intellectual challenges posed by simply living in the Pegasus galaxy, to say nothing of the ingenuity he had to display every single day just to keep this city of the Ancients running. However, none of that seemed to explain his insomnia – in many ways he felt more exhilarated and alive now than he'd ever been in his life, so why was he having so much trouble sleeping? What the hell was keeping him awake? To say that Rodney was not someone who thought a great deal about his emotions would be an understatement – he was barely aware he had any, save for feeling irritable with everyone who couldn't keep up with him intellectually, which was most people. Now Rodney found himself feeling irritable with himself.

"Oh for god's sake. Either get some sleep or do something useful," he muttered to himself, getting up and glancing out of the window at the beautiful sea view. As he watched the waves rippling in the inky night, he felt that familiar gnawing sensation in his stomach, a sense that something was displaced. Something wasn't right, but he had no idea what. Could it be the Wraith? Had they returned? Rodney glanced skywards, not seriously expecting to find his answer there, and he wasn't surprised by the absence of a flotilla of Wraith ships hanging threateningly overhead.

"Yes, the Wraith are a constant threat, but you're not Teyla," he growled under his breath. "You wouldn't be able to sense their proximity, even if they were 10 feet away." That freaked him out so much that he glanced around just to check there weren't any Wraith lurking in his quarters, but the room was still and quiet. "Idiot," Rodney berated himself, but

still he couldn't shake the feeling that something wasn't right – something was out of place, wasn't where it *should* be, and it was annoying him. Rodney wasn't a man who had ever acted on instinct – intellectual impulse, yes, but not instinct - so he had no way of making sense of what he was feeling. Instead, the sensation kept him awake at night, making him even more irritable than usual during the day. There was only one thing to do in the circumstances. Rodney took a deep breath and dealt with this unsettling emotion the way he dealt with most emotions – he pulled on his jacket over his pyjamas, put his shoes on, and went to work.

The lab was empty and eerie when he got there. Most of the occupants of Atlantis were sleeping exhaustedly in their beds, except for the nightwatch, and Rodney felt his spirits lift. One good thing about working while everyone else was sleeping was that he wouldn't be interrupted by a constant stream of people placing idiotic demands on his time and attention. He was so pleased with this observation that he started whistling quietly to himself as he potted around the lab, grabbing all the bits and pieces of equipment that he wanted. There was one thing in particular that had been bothering him for months, and maybe now he'd finally have the peace and quiet he needed to work on the problem. Having gathered up all he needed, Rodney took himself off to the room that housed the weapons Chair. He dumped his equipment on the floor, went over to the Chair, and examined it closely.

"This bit works the drone warheads, so why do we need this bit?" he asked nobody in particular, resting his hands on the large, energy-processing cell that filled the bottom section of the Chair's central column. "It's almost as if you're trying to engage some kind of energy beam – but that's not how the Chair works. Or is it?" Another good thing about working alone, a small part of Rodney's brain observed cheerfully as he tinkered with the Chair, was that he could talk out loud to his heart's content and nobody thought him strange, or asked him any irritating questions based on what he'd just said.

Rodney puzzled over the problem, engrossed in thought, for a couple of hours, until it suddenly occurred to him that it was the middle of the night, his research on the Chair was going nowhere, and he was finally feeling tired. He pondered going back to bed, but the problem with the Chair was still bugging him, so instead he decided to take a nap, and then begin again when he felt more refreshed.

"Might as well make use of the damn thing," he muttered to himself, sitting in the Chair. The Chair lit up as he sat down, but he quashed any thoughts of weaponry or battle and the Chair's lights quickly dimmed down again, to the level of a child's nightlight. "Thank you," Rodney told it, wondering whether he needed the Doctor's help to solve this particular problem. The Ancients' technology was so inextricably linked with physiology that sometimes it was hard to tell where physics left off and biology took over.

Rodney curled onto his side and closed his eyes, wondering whether he should call Beckett in straight away, or wait until morning. He wasn't remotely concerned about disturbing the doctor at this hour of the night, but his eyes stung, and he was aware that he needed some rest if he was to be at his best. Just a catnap would do – but now that he'd closed his eyes, that other sensation had come back again – the gnawing sensation in his stomach that had

kept him awake in the first place.

"You need to think about something nice," he grumbled to himself, wrapping his arms around his body and curling up some more. He had a sudden mental image of Major Sheppard laughing at something he'd said the previous day and rolled his eyes. "I said something *nice*," he warned himself, and consciously shoved Sheppard out of his mind's eye and tried focusing on an old fantasy instead; Samantha Carter, wearing an unfeasibly tight uniform, talking to him about ancient technology. "Mmm, that's more like it," Rodney sighed. Somehow, during the course of their conversation, Samantha would feel an unaccountable need to strip off her top, while still talking, very fast, about ZPMs. Rodney relaxed. This was familiar, comfortable territory and he felt a warm glow rise in his groin. A few seconds later, the lights on the Chair pulsed bright blue, and it emitted such a high pitched hum that Rodney half-jumped, half-fell out of it, and ended up in an ungainly heap on his backside beside it.

"Now what the hell was...?" he began, but was interrupted by a call on his headset.

"Rodney..." Major Sheppard's voice. Typical. The man had no sense of timing.

"I'm busy," Rodney interrupted, getting to his feet and venturing back to the Chair, which, now that it no longer had an occupant, had stopped glowing that bright shade of blue.

"I've found something," Sheppard told him.

"So have I!" Rodney replied.

"I said it first," Sheppard countered smoothly. Rodney stopped, arm half outstretched towards the Chair, and rolled his eyes heavenward.

"It's not a contest, Major. I'm sure whatever you've found is very interesting but I happen to think that..."

"I'm in the west wing of the city, on level 5, directly opposite the South West pier. Just get here. Now," Sheppard said, and then the link was cut.

"Yes sir, Major Bossyboots sir," Rodney griped, doing a mock salute as he tore himself reluctantly away from the Chair.

The lower west wing was one of those areas of the city that nobody had widely explored. In fact, Rodney wasn't entirely sure that any of the Atlantis team had ever been in this particular wing of the city – they were slowly exploring Atlantis, and finding new things all the time, but Rodney doubted that what Sheppard had found was important enough to interrupt his own crucial research into weaponry that could protect them from the next Wraith attack, whenever that came.

"What is it?" Rodney growled as he stomped into the only room on Level 5 that had its door open. "I'm very busy..." He stopped short. Ahead of him was a peculiar little tableau of people; Sheppard was standing in the middle of the room, with Beckett on one side and Teyla on the other – and standing in front of them was the hazy, glowing, hologrammatic figure of a woman in a long white robe.

"Oh great. You've brought me all the way down here to see another one of those welcome holograms," Rodney complained.

"It's not a welcome hologram," Sheppard said, remaining unmoving. "This one is interactive. She answers questions."

"What?" Rodney pushed his way forward and the hologram turned at the movement, looked at him, smiled...and then fizzled out. "What happened to it?" Rodney demanded.

"It keeps doing that – there is some kind of fault on it. We got it working again last time but she does not seem to stay running for long," Teyla explained.

"How did you get it working last time?" Rodney asked, going over to the generating mechanism and examining it carefully.

"Uh, Major Sheppard kicked it," Beckett said, in an apologetic tone.

"He did what?! This is sensitive Ancient technology, Major – you don't take your size 10 boots to it just because it's not..."

"It was flickering!" Sheppard protested. "I thought if I gave it a bit of a nudge then it would, you know, clear itself."

"It's not a *television*, Major," Rodney reprimanded irritably.

"I know that, Rodney. But it does have a similar signal-based operating system," Sheppard replied patiently, which, Rodney had to admit, was true enough. "And besides, kicking it worked. Now, can you fix it?"

"Well, if you haven't completely broken the damn thing..." Rodney muttered, fiddling with the controls. Nothing happened. There was no visible sign of damage. Rodney nudged it slightly with his foot. Nothing. Swallowing his pride, and totally ignoring Sheppard's "I told you so" look, Rodney swung his foot against it more forcefully, and the hologram fizzed into life again. Her gaze alighted on Sheppard first, and she bowed towards him, a deep, low bow.

"You are very welcome here, My Lord Protector," she said, gazing at Sheppard with what looked, to Rodney, suspiciously like an expression of adoration on her hazy features.

"My Lord what?" Rodney exploded. "And I thought you said she wasn't a welcome hologram?"

"She is not," Teyla said, moving forwards. "She seems to...recognize us." The hologram turned at her movement and gazed towards her, her smile brightening again.

"Welcome, My Lady Warrior," she said, giving Teyla a little bow.

Beckett gave a little cough and she turned gracefully towards him. "And you too, My Lord Healer. I am pleased to see you, My Lord. How may I be of assistance?"

"My Lord Protector? My Lord Healer?" Rodney rolled his eyes. "The pair of you will be insufferable after this."

The hologram turned at the sound of his voice. "Ah – I was wondering where you were, My Lord Devoter," she said, giving him the same little bow she had given to the others.

"What?" Rodney spun around, gazing at the others. "What the hell is a Lord Devoter? What does that mean? How come the rest of you get to have all the fancy and yet weirdly appropriate titles – well except for you, Major - but Healer...Warrior...I can see where she's coming from there with Beckett and Teyla. Surely she's got my title wrong? Surely she means...I don't know..."

"My Lord Smarty Pants?" Sheppard suggested.

"I was thinking more of My Lord..."

"Egghead?" Beckett butted in helpfully.

"No! My Lord Scientist...or My Lord..."

"Smartass?" Sheppard supplied with a raised eyebrow.

Rodney gave up. "Anyway, you said she was interactive?"

"Yep – ask her a question," Sheppard said.

"Okay. Why did you just call him My Lord Protector?" Rodney asked, because the grand title Sheppard had been given was annoying him.

The hologram gave him another of those bright smiles. "One Lord Protector is born in every generation," she said. "Sometimes our people have no need of them, and sometimes they are vital for our defence."

"Hmm." Rodney had to admit that Sheppard had defended them all magnificently and bravely on many occasions – and despite the man's prowess in battle, he also seemed to have more than two brain cells to rub together as well, which never ceased to amaze Rodney who had generally always found the military mind to be impossibly stupid.

"You say this Lord Protector is born?" Beckett asked, edging forward, his eyes glowing with a fascinated intellectual zeal that Rodney recognized all too well. "Are you saying it's a genetic thing? That there's something in his genetic makeup that makes him the Lord Protector?"

"That is right, My Lord Healer." The hologram nodded at Beckett encouragingly. At that moment, Elizabeth hurried into the room.

"Sorry – I got delayed. What is it that you've found?" she asked, and then stopped short when she saw the hologram. "A message from the Ancients?" she asked, her eyes lighting up.

"An *interactive* message," Rodney said, puffing up proudly, as if he'd found the hologram and not Sheppard.

"She speaks to us?" Elizabeth stepped forward, a note of wonder in her voice. "I'm pleased to meet you. My name is Dr Elizabeth Weir and I am in charge of the Atlantis mission."

The hologram ignored her. It didn't even turn in Elizabeth's direction, but remained looking expectantly at Beckett. The team all glanced at each other, unsure what was happening.

"Is she on the blink again?" Sheppard asked.

"No...she appears to be working...but she doesn't appear to be aware that Elizabeth is speaking to her," Rodney said, confused.

"Could you tell us how many people are in the room?" Sheppard asked her.

The hologram turned back to him and smiled again. "Certainly. There are 4 of you. My Lord Protector, My Lady Warrior, My Lord Healer and of course my Lord Devoter." Her face creased into a fond smile as she gazed at Rodney. "He would never be far away."

"Why 'of course'?" Rodney pondered out loud. "Why wouldn't I be far away?"

"Because, of course, wherever My Lord..."

At that moment, irritatingly, the hologram fizzled again and disappeared.

"Damn," Rodney growled.

"She couldn't see me at all. She didn't even know I was in the room," Elizabeth pondered in a puzzled tone. "And what were all those strange names she gave to you?" She glanced around at them, a worried knot creasing her forehead.

"I think I might have an explanation," Beckett said, while Rodney went back to fiddling with the hologram's controls to see if he could bring her back. "She mentioned that Major Sheppard had something in his genetic makeup – something she recognized instantly - and I'm guessing by the way she was talking that she recognized something similar in all of us

too – except you, Doctor Weir," Beckett added apologetically. "I think she was designed by the Ancients to only recognize certain gene patterns, so they could be sure they were only giving information to the right people. Now, Major Sheppard, as we all know, has the strongest form of the Ancient gene that we've yet encountered. I have it in a more minor form, and so does Teyla. Dr McKay responded successfully to genetic manipulation, but it didn't work for you, Dr Weir. I can only presume that she is programmed not to respond to or recognize you if your genes don't fit."

"Genes don't fit. Very droll," Rodney acknowledged as he continued to work on the hologram. After a few minutes he tried kicking the generator again, and when that didn't work, he had to admit defeat.

"Maybe she needs to recharge her batteries or something," Sheppard said.

"A very technical explanation, Major," Rodney snorted.

"You're the scientist, not me, My Lord Devoter," Sheppard grinned. "Maybe you have a better explanation?"

"You only want her fixed so she can continue to flatter your ego with all this 'Lord Protector' nonsense," Rodney jibed, stung because he hated to admit that he had no idea how to get the hologram working again.

"You just don't like the name she gave you," Sheppard replied, his hazel eyes twinkling with amusement.

"Rodney, is there a reason why you're in your pyjamas?" Elizabeth asked, breaking up the sniping between the two of them. For the first time, Rodney became aware that everyone else was in uniform, while he was still in his night garb.

"I was working," he said stiffly.

"That would explain why you're not in uniform then," Elizabeth said sweetly.

"I mean...it's the middle of the night for god's sake!" Rodney exclaimed.

"Actually, it's 9.15 in the morning," Beckett chipped in.

"Is it?" Rodney glanced at his watch, wondering where the night had gone – and that reminded him of his project with the Chair. "So it is!" he exclaimed. "Well, this has been fun, but I don't have time to stand around here chatting. I have work to do." And so saying, he turned on his heel and headed towards the door.

"What about the hologram?" Sheppard called after him.

"I have important scientific projects to work on, Major. I'm sure you can get the hologram working all by yourself with all that specialist, protectoring-type knowledge you have.

Perhaps you could try kicking it again - you're good at that," Rodney suggested with a superior smile, and with that he sauntered back to his quarters, feeling extremely refreshed. He always liked having the last word. Especially when it was with Major Sheppard.

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The break seemed to do Rodney good, because once he'd had a shower, changed into his uniform, and returned to the weapon room, he felt positively inspired and raring to return to the project he'd left behind. He put all thoughts of being a 'Lord Devoter', whatever the hell that meant, out of his mind, and turned the full force of his concentration on his work – with the result that less than 2 hours later he had the breakthrough he had been looking for.

"Ingenious!" he declared, crouching beside the Chair with a look of wonderment on his face. All he needed to do now was to test his theory, and there was only one person who could help him do that. True, that person would be reluctant, but then he always was where the Chair was concerned. Rodney didn't doubt for a moment that he could railroad him into aiding him though. -He hit the intercom and said, in a tone of immense self-satisfaction, "Doctor Beckett, your presence is required."

Beckett was predictably wary, but Rodney used his usual tactic of not taking no for an answer, and once he explained the genetic and physiological implications of his experiments, he could see Beckett's curiosity become engaged despite his misgivings. Before long, they were deeply immersed in the project, and would have continued that way if they hadn't been interrupted a few hours later by Dr Weir's voice on the intercom.

"McKay, Beckett – I need you up here right away," she said.

"What is it NOW?" Rodney sighed. "Honestly, can't a man immerse himself in a perfectly respectable scientific project without being subjected to constant interruptions from..."

"I'm not sure it IS all that respectable," Beckett said, flushing slightly.

"I don't care what the hell you're working on," Elizabeth said. "The Wraith are back."

"What?" Rodney exchanged a worried glance with Beckett. "But they left!" he protested. "The cloaking device worked – they thought we'd destroyed the city!"

"Well obviously now they've changed their minds and they're on their way back," Elizabeth replied. "I need you both in the control room now."

Rodney didn't even bother to reply. He and Beckett both left the room at a run.

A council of war was already in session by the time Rodney and Beckett arrived and took their seats.

"We have a big problem," Sheppard told the assembled personnel. "We're basically back to where we were a couple of days ago. We're facing several hive ships, and even more

cruisers. The shield will hold for a few days but..."

"Uh..." Rodney interrupted. Sheppard raised an eyebrow. "The shield would have held for a few days under the Wraith bombardment but we've been draining the ZPM by using its energy to maintain the cloak around the city," Rodney said wearily. "If they attack us the same way they did before, then we only have a couple of hours, at most, before the ZPM is depleted."

"Are we sure that they've seen through our ruse about destroying the city?" Beckett asked desperately. "Maybe they're just coming back for a bit of a second look?"

"I can't take that risk," Elizabeth replied. "If we continue to cloak the city then we can't raise the shield and we'll be defenceless. I have to assume they've found out that we cloaked Atlantis and that's why they've turned around. We have to raise the shield again."

"How much time do we have before they get here?" Rodney asked.

"About 10 hours," Caldwell replied. Rodney bit his lip – that gave them no time at all to mount a credible defence, let alone any kind of attack. "And our situation hasn't changed much since the last time they were here," Caldwell added. "Except the Daedalus isn't fully repaired yet so I guess we're at even more of a disadvantage this time around."

"Are we sure there aren't any other ways to attack them?" Elizabeth asked, gazing around at her room full of experts. Nobody met her eye.

"That's the problem – we're all out of options." Sheppard folded his arms across his chest and glanced at Rodney for confirmation. Rodney ignored him. He had an idea – he just wasn't sure whether to mention it.

"The truth is they want Atlantis, and they are not going to stop until they get it," Teyla said earnestly. "I know the Wraith mind – we have woken them from their hibernation and antagonized them beyond endurance – we even fooled them into thinking we had destroyed ourselves. They are angry, and they will not stop until they have annihilated us, claimed Atlantis for their own...and found their way to Earth."

"So we either destroy the city ourselves and gate back to Earth, or we go down with the city," Elizabeth mused.

"If we're going to gate out of here we'll have to do it before they arrive. It'll take one hell of a lot of power to get us to Earth, and the ZPM won't be able to hold the shield and gate us home at the same time. So once they arrive...it'll be too late for us to escape," Rodney informed the room.

"Those who want to should be given the choice to leave – while they can still gate to safety," Elizabeth said.

"Okay. But I'm not going anywhere," Sheppard said stubbornly. "Anyone else want to gate

out of here before they arrive?" He glanced around the room, but was met only by silence, and the shaking of heads.

"Fine. Then we stay. And we fight," Sheppard said.

"The Chair..." Elizabeth began.

"We haven't got nearly enough drone warheads to destroy that Wraith fleet. The Chair's useless," Sheppard told her tersely.

"Well...not quite useless," Rodney said softly, glancing at Beckett.

"McKay, we're not ready, we've barely tested the thing and those ships are less than 10 hours away!" Beckett exclaimed.

"Do you have any other suggestions?" Rodney snapped. Beckett sighed and rubbed a hand over his eyes.

"They won't like it," he said.

"Won't like what?" Elizabeth asked, gazing from one to the other. "McKay, if we have any kind of weaponry that we can use against the Wraith, then I have to know about it."

"Well...there is something," Rodney said. "The Chair uses drone warheads, we know that, but it also has some kind of aggressive energy targeting beam as well."

"Any energy beam powerful enough to destroy those ships will take too much power away from the shield – I can't risk it," Elizabeth told him.

"The beam doesn't use ZPM energy," McKay replied, watching as that little bombshell struck home. "The Ancients were clever – they knew you couldn't rely too much on any one energy source so they investigated others."

"Such as?" Sheppard frowned. "There's no other energy force on this base strong enough to power a weapon of the kind you just described."

"Well, actually there is." Rodney gave a superior little smile. He loved imparting bombshells. He puffed up his chest and went into full lecture mode. "As you know, Ancient technology is inextricably bound to the genetic make up of the people using it. Major Sheppard has demonstrated that by his ability to use Ancient weapons and ships – they respond to him. Even the damn doors open for him if he wants to walk through. This entire city is in tune with him, it can read him – and that works both ways. Those of us with the right genetic makeup can use the Ancient technology – and it can use us. The Chair's energy beam feeds solely off human energy."

"Human energy?" Elizabeth repeated blankly.

"That's right." Rodney gave another satisfied little smile. Despite the imminent danger, there was some part of him that couldn't help loving this. Showing off was one of his main pleasures in life.

Sheppard though, that lazy half-smile of his hiding a sharper mind than most people gave him credit for, was already one step ahead of the rest of them.

"What kind of energy, McKay?" he asked softly, dangerously, leaning back in his chair and fixing the scientist with a piercing stare. Rodney swallowed, and glanced at Beckett who had gone a curious shade of salmon pink.

"Human sexual energy," Rodney said, and then he ploughed on quickly before anyone could react. "The ancients designed the weapon to be able to make use of whatever natural resources exist in the absence of any external power source so..."

"Hang on, back up a bit, Rodney," Elizabeth interrupted him, at just about the same time as uproar broke out in the room. "Are you saying that in order to activate that beam, someone has to sit in that Chair and, uh...have sex?"

"Well that's a very crude definition of how it works. We're talking about complicated Ancient technology here, whereby..."

"Rodney!" she snapped.

"Uh...yes," Rodney blinked. "Someone has to sit in the Chair, and, uh...look, I don't know what all the fuss is about! This is good news! It's an instantly available energy source – it costs us nothing, and if it works then it'll create enough juice to zap all those Wraith ships right out of the sky. Okay, what did I just say?" Rodney whispered to Beckett, noticing the shocked expressions on their faces.

"I think the word 'juice' was possibly a little bit inappropriate in the circumstances," Beckett whispered back to him.

"How on earth did you discover all this, Rodney?" Elizabeth asked quietly. Rodney felt himself flushing.

"Just a hunch," he said briskly, not wanting to dwell on that. A memory of Samantha Carter removing her top while talking about ZPMs came to mind, and that wasn't something he wanted to share with anyone.

"Doctor – do you agree with McKay's assessment?" Elizabeth asked Beckett who was now flushing a fetching shade of bright beetroot as he remembered the toe-curling testing process Rodney had just put him through.

"Yes, Elizabeth," Beckett said, in a strangled tone.

"Tell me, Rodney," Sheppard asked, in a deceptively mild tone. "Who would you

recommend to sit in the Chair and perform this vital function?"

"Well..." Rodney paused. The look Sheppard was giving him wasn't mild at all – it was deadly dangerous, and Rodney was suddenly aware that he was treading on some very thin ice.

"It doesn't matter," Elizabeth said. "I wouldn't order anyone to do this. It's a gross intrusion into someone's privacy."

"Rodney?" Sheppard said softly, still waiting for an answer, his tone now decidedly icy.

"Well, you *are* the Lord Protector!" Rodney exploded. "You seemed to like the title well enough earlier, and this would be...well, protecting. And let's face it, you're the one with the fancy Ancient gene that sets all the technology in this place whirring. You've also got the technical and military knowledge to know how to use the Chair to best advantage."

"And would this be a solo mission?" Sheppard asked, those hazel eyes of his giving nothing away. "Because, I seem to remember from biology class that this kind of thing usually requires two people."

"We don't think...that is," Beckett said weakly, "uh, a, uh, solo mission wouldn't provide the power we need to activate the beam. You can get a rise out of it that way, but you can't get enough to do any real damage."

"Who's using the inappropriate language now?" Rodney hissed at him.

"Sorry," Beckett stammered.

"Did you guys actually *test* this?" Elizabeth asked, the expression on her face one of barely disguised horror.

"Well...kind of..." Rodney replied. "Some of it we extrapolated from the available evidence, obviously."

"So, we've established that it has to be me, with a partner. Do I get to choose, or do you guys get to decide that too?" Sheppard asked.

"Major, nobody is asking you to..." Elizabeth began but Sheppard held up his hand, still gazing intently at Rodney, waiting for his answer. Rodney swallowed hard, and was unaccountably relieved when Beckett stepped in.

"Major, there's something interesting about your genetic makeup – not just in the obvious way that you can operate Ancient technology, but there's also something else, something that's been puzzling me for a long time. I can figure out most of what that special gene you've got does, but there's one part of it that makes no sense. I think it might be that which needs to activate the weapon – and if that's the case, then you need to have a partner who has the corresponding gene – kind of like a key fitting into a lock."

"Supposing there isn't anyone on Atlantis with that gene?" Sheppard asked quietly.

"We just have to hope there is. Otherwise..." Beckett shrugged.

"We're all doomed?" Sheppard suggested.

"It kind of looks that way, yes," Beckett said apologetically. "I've already got everyone's blood samples and genetic profiles – I could run a test on them and find out who the best candidates are," he said, glancing at Elizabeth.

"No. I've already said, I wouldn't ask anyone to do this." She shook her head firmly.

"Elizabeth – we may have no other option," Sheppard told her.

"You can't seriously tell me you're happy about this!"

"No, I can't. But I have a duty here, and I'm prepared to do it. Why don't we tell everyone what's going on – if they agree to have their blood samples analysed then fine...if not, then that's cool too. It'll be entirely voluntary. And I'm not just saying all this because I'm looking for an easy lay," Sheppard added, leaning back in his chair with a look that dared anyone to argue with him. Nobody did.

"Damn. So, we have a supersonic beam operated by sexual energy. The Ancients – they were kind of kinky weren't they?" Sheppard said, musingly.

"Not at all!" Rodney bristled. "Look, I don't know what all the fuss is about. It's a simple matter of two people doing what comes naturally, and in so doing just happening to save all our lives and defeat the evil, life-sucking aliens who want to destroy not only us and this city but the planet we came from where several billion people are, at this very moment in time, carrying on with their lives, blithely unaware that those lives hang by a thread, just because a few people here on Atlantis are a little bit squeamish about sex!"

There was a long silence. Everyone stared at Rodney.

"I'll be in my laboratory if anyone needs me," Rodney said with as much dignity as he could muster, getting up stiffly and stalking out of the room. Somehow having the last word hadn't been quite as much fun that time around.

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A few hours passed, and nobody ventured down to the lab to see him. Rodney was both pleased and anxious about that. Perhaps he'd gone too far out on a limb this time. All the same, the threat remained real, and the Wraith ships got closer with each passing second so Rodney didn't think he'd done anything wrong in drawing his discovery to their attention. He busied himself boosting the ZPM and strengthening the shield – there was little else he could do. Finally, a soft-voiced Beckett contacted him.

"Dr McKay – I've finished the blood analyses. D'you want to come up here?" he asked.

"On my way," Rodney replied, pleased to find that at least they'd proceeded with the testing process. He was sure that despite everything that had been said in that meeting, Major Sheppard wouldn't be averse to a little extra-curricular activity with one of the Atlantis ladies. Rodney wondered, idly, which one of them it would be. His money was on Teyla – she had a slightly alien physiology and she came from the Pegasus galaxy, so was therefore more likely to have some kind of genetic weirdness going on. Besides, she and Major Sheppard got along very well. Everyone knew that. Rodney ignored the angry rush of blood that seemed to rise to his head whenever he thought of Major Sheppard in a clinch with a beautiful woman. He presumed it was just jealousy on his part – when had a woman last looked at him after all? And Sheppard was every inch the action hero, with the good looks to match the heroic demeanour. There were probably women all over the base with their fingers crossed right now, hoping they'd be the ones who got to share some quality time with the erstwhile Lord Protector. It was a bit like Cinderella, Rodney decided, only with a blood test instead of a glass slipper.

Sheppard, Teyla, and Weir were all standing around the perimeter of the Doctor's office when he got there, each of them looking decidedly uncomfortable as they waited for the Doctor to impart the news.

"So, is it an exact match, or a partial match?" Rodney asked.

"Oh it's very exact," Beckett replied. "Surprisingly so. There were some partial matches but this one was stunning. Look."

He pointed to the swirling picture on his screen. "This here is the Ancient gene that Major Sheppard has. You see this bit." His finger alighted on a strangely shaped, jutting-out part of the gene. "We found others that sort of work with it." Beckett pulled up various other strange shapes, some of which fitted the original better than others. "But then we found this." Beckett clicked on another picture, somersaulted the gene so it was upside down, and slotted it over the tip of Sheppard's gene. The two clicked into place so that there was no evidence of the join whatsoever – it could have all been one complete gene, not two separate genes from two completely different people.

"That's extraordinary," Elizabeth gasped.

"I agree. In fact it's so extraordinary that it leads me to believe it isn't accidental – it's almost as if these two genes were designed to fit together this way," Beckett said.

"So, who's the lucky lady?" Rodney asked, glancing up at Sheppard, and feeling yet another wave of red-hot annoyance surge deep in his gut.

"Well, that's where it gets awkward," Beckett murmured. "I'd have to ask that this information doesn't go any further than this room."

"Of course." Rodney stood up, and clasped his hands behind his back. "Well?"

Beckett glanced at Sheppard, and bit his lip. "I'm not sure you're going to like this," he said.

"Oh, Major Sheppard is a big boy. I'm sure he'll cope," Rodney said, confidently.

"It's you, Doctor McKay," Beckett said softly.

"Hmmm?" Rodney gazed at Beckett with a glazed expression. "I'm sorry?"

Sheppard gave a little snort.

"It's you, Rodney," Beckett said, in an apologetic tone. Teyla gasped, and Elizabeth made a strange sound in the back of her throat that sounded oddly like a dolphin caught in a net.

"What's me?" Rodney asked, glancing around, feeling that something important had just happened and it had passed him by completely, leaving him one step behind, which wasn't where he liked to be at all.

"It's your gene. Your gene fits Major Sheppard's – you're the match, Rodney," Beckett told him.

The room went very quiet. Rodney gazed in horror at the genes spiralling happily together on Beckett's computer screen, and then, in shock, he glanced up and met Major Sheppard's amused hazel eyes.

"There must be some mistake," Rodney croaked, his throat suddenly going dry. "It's not possible! I mean...I don't even have the Ancient gene naturally - you had to give me the genetic manipulation therapy...so it can't be me!"

"I'm afraid it is, Rodney," Beckett told him sympathetically. "It appears that the therapy we gave you activated a dormant gene you already have - although it's possible that the dormant gene had already been activated even without the therapy, simply by being in contact with Major Sheppard because he has a dominant version of the gene. There's a strange kind of switching mechanism on it that I haven't quite figured out yet."

"But...but..." Rodney floundered, looking for arguments to refute what he was being told and not coming up with any.

"I don't know what you're worried about, Rodney," Sheppard told him, slapping him casually on the shoulder. "It's a simple matter of two people doing what comes naturally, after all," he said sweetly, quoting Rodney's own words back at him.

"But when I said that..." Rodney blustered.

"When you said that you thought this would be about me – not you. It was simpler then wasn't it?" Sheppard raised an eyebrow.

"No! I didn't realize...I mean...when I said that, I just assumed, naturally, as you would, that your genetic partner would be female! Not male!"

"Well, I told you the Ancients were kinky, but you wouldn't have it," Sheppard replied, although his tone was kind, and lacked the 'I told you so' bite that Rodney had been expecting.

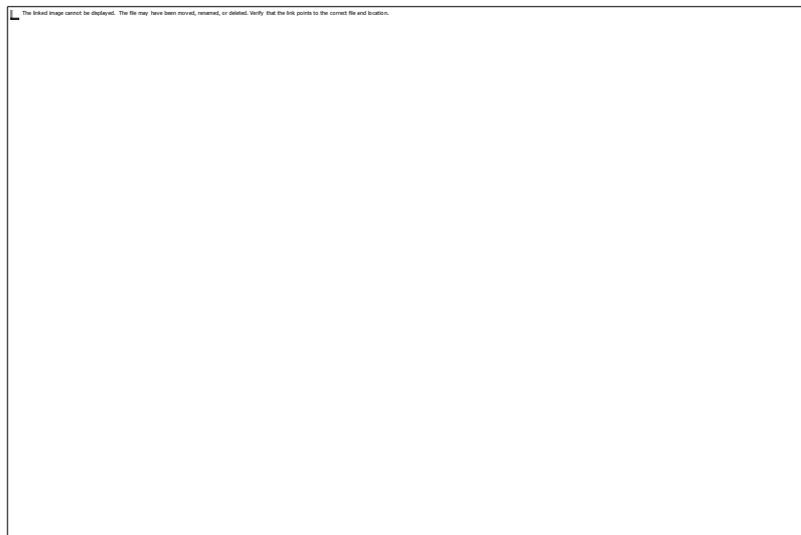
"And I told both of you that nobody has to go through with this," Elizabeth said. "I'm not issuing any orders. We'll do our best to fight them – this would be a worst case scenario, and it'll be up to you two whether you feel able to go ahead with it."

"Thank you, Elizabeth. However, I'd be a hypocrite after what I said in that meeting if I turned around at this stage and refused," Rodney said stiffly.

"Let's hope it doesn't come to it. Now, I think you two might need some time to discuss this recent turn of events," Elizabeth said, nodding to both Beckett and Teyla and indicating that they should leave Sheppard and McKay alone.

Chapter 2 by Xanthe

Author's Notes:



Rodney stared glumly at the whirling joined genes on Beckett's screen while the others left. In all honesty, he didn't have a clue where to look. He just knew that the last place on earth he wanted to look right now was into Sheppard's hazel eyes.

"I'm still finding it hard to understand..." he muttered to himself when they were alone." I mean...why? Why would our genes match like this?"

"Will the weapon work, Rodney?" Sheppard asked softly, and Rodney slowly raised his gaze to meet those searching hazel eyes.

"I don't know," Rodney replied. "Probably not. I mean, it's absurd isn't it? No, it won't work. There's no point even trying. Don't worry, Major. I won't tie you down and force you to go through with what must be a pretty unpleasant prospect." He shuddered at the thought of it – of course Sheppard must be completely freaked out at the very idea of... Rodney couldn't even go there in his mind, and he pushed the image away.

"Rodney, you're a brilliant scientist. You're also arrogant, irritating and a royal pain in the ass, but I've never known you get anything in your field wrong. This is your field, Rodney, not mine, and I think you believe it'll work," Sheppard said, advancing on Rodney, never allowing his gaze to drop.

Rodney sighed. "I have every reason to believe it will work but there aren't any guarantees, Major," he murmured. "I don't have all the answers – and you've got no idea how much it pains me to admit that."

Sheppard gave a wry laugh, and Rodney gazed at him suspiciously.

"You know – you're not nearly as surprised about this as I thought you would be," he said.

"Well, I've had a few hours to get used to it," Sheppard reminded him.

"No...not that...this." Rodney waved his hand at the image of the genes still merrily twisting away onscreen. "You don't seem surprised that it's me, that I'm your genetic match."

"I got the hologram working again," Sheppard said. Rodney blinked.

"Hello? Did we just suddenly switch topics of conversation?"

"No. It's still the same conversation. I learned quite a bit from that hologram. You might want to go and talk to her yourself. It might help you make up your mind."

"Make up my mind about what?" Rodney asked. Sheppard's smile was slow, and it twisted the edges of his lips in a way that Rodney found curiously compelling.

"About what your decision will be in a few hours' time," he said.

"You're not seriously suggesting that we go through with this?" Rodney hissed, dumbfounded. Even leaving aside his own feelings, and, as usual, he had no idea what they might be, he couldn't believe that Sheppard would want in any way to be intimate with him. "Come on, Major. I must be the last person in Atlantis you'd want to have sex with!"

Sheppard gave a wry little smile and his hand gently took hold of Rodney's shoulder and squeezed, creating a jolt of electricity that surprised Rodney – and burned him all the way

down to his gut. "Go and see the hologram, Rodney," he said softly. "Then decide what you want to do. I'm not putting any more pressure on you than that – one way or the other. Now, I have a city to protect, so if you'll excuse me."

And then he was gone.

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Rodney stood where he was for a moment, wondering how the hell his life had become so complicated in the past half hour. Before then, it had all seemed relatively simple, but now he was completely at sea and he wasn't used to that sensation. Rodney had coped very well all his life by burying himself in his work and his intellect, and ignoring any complicated areas of existence, like relationships and emotions, and now he felt as if he'd just run full tilt into a brick wall, and was lying dazed and winded on the ground.

He really doubted that the hazy hologram, with her weird sense of titular appropriateness, would be able to help him, but, in the absence of any other options, there wasn't much else he could do but go down to the lower west wing and find out what she had to say. Besides, some small part of him was really annoyed that Major Sheppard knew something that he didn't; Rodney liked to know everything.

Rodney sleepwalked his way down to the west wing, completely lost in thought. How on earth could this have happened? Were the Ancients **really** that kinky? And why? Why, above all else, did it have to be him? Just the idea of getting naked with Major Sheppard freaked him out, let alone either of them actually **touching** the other.

The hologram sprang into life when he stepped into the room, instantly activating once he got close enough to the sensory unit where she was stored.

"My Lord Devoter." She bowed deeply and Rodney started feeling a little better; he rather liked being bowed to.

"Okay – that's where we need to start. What on earth is a Lord Devoter when it's at home?" Rodney asked tetchily.

"My Lord is named for his devotion to the Lord Protector," the hologram said.

"My devotion to...? Oh for god's sake!" Rodney screwed up his face. "The only person I'm devoted to, in case you haven't noticed, is myself!"

"I don't believe that's true," the hologram said, her voice grave and low. "Maybe you do not know yourself as well as you think you do, My Lord."

"I know myself perfectly well, thank you very much," Rodney bristled.

"Then My Lord will no doubt be aware of the many times he has risked his own life to save that of the Lord Protector," she replied.

"Well...I..." Rodney had a sudden image of Major Sheppard, lying on the floor of the puddle-jumper with a giant, life-sucking insect attached to his neck; he remembered the sick feeling in his stomach as he watched Sheppard's life ebbing away, and how he had used every single ounce of his ingenuity to save him. He also recalled leaving the safety of his hiding place and going to the Major's aid when the other man had been locked in deadly combat with a powerful Wraith adversary, and then there was the time when he'd taken a knife wound to his arm rather than give away the Major's whereabouts when the city had been taken by the Genii. "Okay – maybe I have saved his life on one or two small occasions," Rodney said, totally surprised to find that was true. "But I would have done that for anyone."

"Have you always been so brave then, My Lord?" she asked him, a knowing twinkle in her eye.

"Well, I..." Rodney remembered his life before Atlantis – before he met Major Sheppard. "I wouldn't exactly say I was ever all that brave, no," he admitted, rubbing a weary hand across his eyes.

"My Lord, in saving the Lord Protector's life you were simply fulfilling your genetic destiny," she told him softly.

"What? That's it?!" Rodney exclaimed. "I exist purely to worship Major John Sheppard? How insulting!" He pulled himself up to his full height and glared at the hologram. "I am one of the foremost physicists on Earth. I'm extremely clever and I have several degrees from various universities to prove it!"

"My Lord, your title was not meant to be an insult," she told him gravely. "In my time, your title would have earned you the greatest respect, equal in rank to the Lord Protector himself. And as for your other talents – I would expect no less. When a Lord or Lady Devoter is born, they are always blessed with many gifts. Only a truly worthy person would be a suitable mate and consort for a Protector of the people, after all."

"Mate and consort?" Rodney gaped at her. "What do you mean 'Mate and consort'?"

"I mean, My Lord, that you belong with the Lord Protector, by his side always, as lover, helpmeet, and friend."

"Are you sure you've got the right man?" Rodney asked, stupefied by this information.

"Yes, My Lord. I am programmed to respond only to those who are able to activate me, and only those with the appropriate genetic heritage may do so." She bowed her head. "I would not be speaking to you if what I say is not true."

"Okay." Rodney took a deep breath. "Today is just one surprise after another," he muttered. "All right, let's back up a bit here. I think you need to start at the beginning and explain all this stuff to me."

"Very well, My Lord." She bowed again. "You will know that we designed much of our technology to respond to the genetic makeup of our kind, to prevent our enemies being able to use it?" she began.

"Yes, yes, I know all that," Rodney said irritably. She smiled at him, not the least bit fazed by his bad temper.

"We are skilled geneticists," she said, "and it occurred to us that one day we might not always be so knowledgeable. We could not rule out the fact that one day, our society might fall back into ignorance."

Rodney nodded. "Well that's pretty much what happened. We call ourselves the second evolution," he told her. She nodded.

"I understand. Many years have passed since I was created and times have changed. In order to keep our race as strong as we could, we programmed a genetic code to activate in every generation, providing a leader who would protect their people with courage and ingenuity. This man or woman would, by virtue of their genetic inheritance, face many trials and pitfalls. It was therefore decided that they should be provided with companions for their travails; an exceptionally gifted healer, to keep him strong and healthy, and to tend his wounds; a warrior, to be his bodyguard, and fight at his side, loyal and strong; and a soul mate, loving and true, to care for him, and keep him happy, both in and out of the bedroom." The smile she gave him didn't contain one iota of lasciviousness at that last part.

"But...but...I'm a *man*," Rodney told her. She gazed at him blankly. "And Major Sheppard is a man," he prompted her, trying to get her to see the difficulty. "So there must be some mistake," he announced firmly. She shook her head.

"No. It was designed this way. My people had no taboos about a man taking another man as his mate, or a woman taking a woman. It would not have factored into our genetic code one way or the other. It is irrelevant to us," she said, in a distant, hazy voice that showed she had absolutely no concept what the problem was.

"Well my people aren't quite so comfortable with it!" Rodney scowled.

"I am sorry. Truly." She bowed her head. "But it was as we designed it, and it worked well for us. We attach no significance to the gender of either the Protector or the Devoter. It makes no difference – genetically the effect is the same. Wherever there is a Protector, a Devoter will be nearby, and he or she will be all and everything that the Protector requires."

Rodney snorted. "Oh really? Perhaps you'd like to have a discussion with Major Sheppard on that one!" he growled. "I'm sure I wouldn't be top on his list of hot babes to share his life with."

"My Lord Protector is provided with what he needs – it may not be what he thinks he wants, but it will be what he needs, and it will be his soul mate, his lover, someone good, faithful,

and true."

"You sound like a really bad love song," Rodney told her. She gave him another of those blank stares and he sighed again. "Really – this can't be true," he said in despair. "Major Sheppard and I...well..." Well what, he thought to himself? What was it about Major Sheppard that always affected him so much, whether he wanted to admit it or not? Why did he always feel better when the Major walked into a room, and worse when he left? Why did he seek the man out, to talk to, and spar with, and why did he love making him laugh so much? He thought of the way John's dark hair sometimes fell over his forehead, and how those hazel eyes sparkled when he was amused by something Rodney had said. And Rodney loved amusing him; he'd admit that much. He never felt more alive when he was with John Sheppard. They talked, and laughed – and they argued. God how they argued!

"We argue all the time," he told the hologram, in a small, stupid, broken voice.

"Maybe he enjoys your passion, and the fire that sparks between you," she told him.

"No. Really. He really doesn't," Rodney sighed. "I don't think Major Sheppard has any feelings about me, one way or the other. I just am. I'm part of this expedition. I'm someone he has to work with."

"You are wrong," she told him simply. "You were designed to fit with him, to be drawn inextricably to him, and he to you, and, now that your paths have crossed, you are finding it very easy to love him."

"I..." Rodney stared somewhere over her left shoulder for a long time. Was that true? He really didn't understand his emotions well enough to know for sure. He did know that regardless of how he might feel, he was sure Major Sheppard didn't harbour any romantic inclinations towards him.

"Trust me," she said, in a gentle, kind voice. "You were made for each other, My Lord. Your feelings will be impossible to deny forever. He is your destiny, and you his."

"It's always been my belief that you make your own destiny."

"In many ways that is so, but sometimes there are stronger forces at work. My Lord Protector's purpose is to protect his people, and yours is to keep him happy, My Lord."

"It sounds kind of old fashioned!" Rodney protested. "Oh, what am I saying? You're not called 'the Ancients' for nothing I suppose. But for god's sake – are you saying I exist merely to be John Sheppard's plaything?" He found himself bristling at the very notion. This didn't fit in with his worldview at all. He had always been the brightest in his class, the leading scientist in his field – Rodney McKay didn't pay second fiddle to anyone! "That's ridiculous. I won't give up my career to run around after him and massage his already quite healthy ego, thank you very much!"

"Do you think my Lord Protector would ask this of you?" the hologram asked, in a puzzled

tone.

"I'd like to see him try!" Rodney snorted.

"I have tried to explain, My Lord, that the Lord Devoter is very highly thought of in our society. He is always learned and wise, and often very talented – maybe musical, or artistic, or in some other way a credit to our society. A lesser mate would not be worthy of the Lord Protector after all."

"Hmm." Rodney felt his pride somewhat mollified by that. He had never thought of himself in terms of being someone else's partner, still less taking care of and loving someone with the kind of devotion that seemed to be implicit in the title that had just been thrust upon him, and he really didn't see how that was going to work, to say nothing of the issue of sex, which he barely wanted to even think about. Yet he was aware that in just a few hours' time, that was something he was very definitely going to have to think about, whether he liked it or not. "The Chair...the weapons chair..." Rodney bit on his lip. "I discovered that it can transmit a powerful beam that draws on sexual energy."

"That is so." She bowed her head.

"We're under attack. In a few hours' time..."

"The Chair will work if it is used correctly. Others can activate and use it, but they will not be able to generate as much power as the Lord Protector will if he uses the Chair with his genetic mate," she told him gently.

"So it's kind of like a duty?" Rodney said, brightening a little. If he could convince himself of that then maybe he could get through this.

"Mostly I believe it is a pleasure – and an honour," she replied.

"Yes, I thought you'd say something like that," Rodney sighed.

"My signal is weakening, My Lord. I need time to re-energise," she told him, her outline flickering as she spoke. "I wish you well. My Lord Devoter must follow his heart, and trust that he has been aptly named - then all will be well."

She flickered one more time, opened her mouth to say something else – and then was gone.

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Rodney stayed where he was for a long time, hoping she'd re-energise quickly enough for him to speak to her again, and also simply to avoid having to go back out there, and talk to people. He was having a hard time getting his head around all this and he was acutely aware of the fact that time was running out, and the Wraith would shortly be upon them. He still wasn't sure what he was feeling; he broke out in a hot sweat at the thought of getting up close and personal with Major Sheppard, but now that he stopped to think about that

reaction, he wasn't entirely sure why. Was he attracted to the Major? Even if he was, could the Major possibly be attracted to him? Rodney was not a modest man. He knew his intellect to be superior to that of just about everyone he'd ever met...but he was much less confident about his physical attractiveness. This fact took him by surprise of and by itself, but he'd never put himself out there and actually looked for a lover and thus had never had to face his own fears in that arena before. Now that all this had happened, he realized the reason **why** he never sought out relationships: he was shit scared. He'd always ignored his sexuality – he'd adopted Samantha Carter as his ideal fantasy sex object based on nothing other than a notion that she was the kind of person he **should** feel attracted to – it had been easier than figuring out the truth after all, and she was a good-looking blonde with brains so she fitted the bill quite nicely. But now that he thought about it he didn't ever remember having actual **feelings** for her.

Rodney was jolted out of his reverie by a booming sound far above him. He leapt to his feet immediately, recognising the sound instantly as being the beginning of the anticipated Wraith attack. He ran back to the control room, shoved people aside to get to his station, and grabbed Zelenka by the shoulders and ejected the man bodily from his seat.

"Out of my way. What's happening? And where's Major Sheppard?" Rodney said, his mind quickly assimilating the data on the screen in front of him. There were several dots on the screen, one of them taking heavy firepower from the others.

"Well?" Rodney glanced up at Elizabeth, who was standing beside him, arms crossed over her chest, looking anxious. "Major Sheppard?" Rodney prompted, too worried to even wonder why his mouth was so dry and his heart pounding so hard. Elizabeth's eyes were shadowed in concern.

"He's on the Daedalus, Rodney," she told him carefully, clearly unsure what the current state of affairs was between the Major and her Head of Science.

"What? But the Daedalus is..." Rodney glanced back at the screen, and flinched when he saw the Daedalus sustain another direct hit. "The Daedalus is outnumbered and under attack on all sides!" Rodney growled.

"I know. I've told Caldwell to withdraw," Elizabeth said.

"Well then why is he still there!" Rodney got to his feet and started pacing around his work station.

"He is trying to get out of there, Doctor McKay," Teyla told him softly. "The puddle jumper is docked with the Daedalus – it was a manoeuvre Major Sheppard and Colonel Caldwell worked out between them to buy us some more time to get as many people off the base as possible and give the shield as long as possible to recharge. Major Sheppard is going to fly back to Atlantis to draw off their fire and give the Daedalus time to escape."

"Major Sheppard is going to do **what**?" Rodney yelled, aware that people were looking at him strangely, but unable to stop himself all the same. "Why doesn't he just beam off of

there? The Daedalus has the technology to do that!"

"He's trying to save their asses, Rodney – Colonel Caldwell has put that ship and his people on the line once again for us," Elizabeth reminded him.

"He will be fine. He is a brilliant pilot," Teyla said, trying to calm the situation.

"Yes. I know that. He is. He'll be fine," Rodney told himself, sitting back down again. But it was no use – he couldn't sit still. He jumped up and down repeatedly for the next few minutes, watching the little puddle-jumper sized blip on the screen as it peeled away from the Daedalus and wavered its way towards Atlantis, outrunning the slower Wraith ships, but being fired at almost continuously.

"How is the shield holding up, Rodney?" Elizabeth asked, forcing him to tear his attention away from Sheppard's return to Atlantis.

"The shield is...well it's holding," Rodney said, checking his instruments. "But this is just the beginning." He glanced back at the puddle-jumper, one eye always on its progress, watching as the little blip drew closer and closer towards Atlantis...and then suddenly faded from the screen – and didn't reappear. "No!" Rodney felt as if his heart had stopped beating for one long, slow second, and all around him a sickly kind of silence fell.

"Anyone miss me?" a familiar voice said behind him, and Rodney heard a rushing sound in his ears as the blood began to pump around his body again.

"Why? Did you go anywhere?" he asked, glancing casually over his shoulder at the dishevelled figure of Major Sheppard.

Sheppard grinned at him, and accepted heartfelt hugs from Elizabeth and Teyla. Rodney thought that Zelenka looked as if he wanted to hug the Major as well, and that thought irrationally annoyed him. Apparently if anyone had the right to hug the Major it was him, and he was restraining himself quite adequately so he didn't see why Zelenka couldn't do the same.

"I flew the ship into a cluster of Wraith vessels and got Colonel Caldwell to beam me out before it hit," Sheppard said.

"Well that's a very valuable drop in the ocean. Well done, Major. Two Wraith ships down, only around 15 or so to go," Rodney commented acerbically.

"That's two ships less to bombard us," Sheppard replied placidly. "And it bought us valuable evacuation and re-charging time. Is everyone out who needs to be out, Elizabeth?"

"Yes, Major. There's just a handful left on Atlantis, but the shield's up now so nobody else can gate out of here."

"Guess we just sit here and wait to die then," Zelenka said cheerfully.

"Maybe," Sheppard replied, looking pointedly at Rodney. Rodney turned back to his controls, feeling the sweat drip down the side of his face. Overhead, the sound of the Wraith bombardment grew louder.

"What's the status of the shields, Rodney?" Elizabeth asked. Rodney didn't reply. He felt as if his brain had disengaged from his body, and he no longer had the power to actually talk.

"Down to 40%," Zelenka said, looking over Rodney's shoulder. "We probably have about two hours before it fails and then...boom!" He waved his hands around expressively.

"Thank you – I think we all know what'll happen when the shield fails," Elizabeth said sharply.

"Rodney," Sheppard said again, softly, calmly, in a tone meant only for him. Rodney swallowed hard and stayed where he was. Nobody said anything. He heard a soft sigh behind him, and then the sound of footsteps and when he looked around, Sheppard had gone. Rodney gazed after him for a moment, lost in a haze of panic, unable to think clearly. Then he glanced up sharply, searching out those occupants of the room who knew what the blood tests had shown up; Beckett was leaning against one wall, his expression carefully neutral, studiously not meeting Rodney's eye. Teyla was standing by Rodney's side, her hand poised as if she wished to touch him, looking down at him with an expression of intense kindness in her eyes. Elizabeth...Rodney couldn't even meet her expectant, steely gaze. She wouldn't hesitate, he thought. Sheppard hadn't hesitated either. Rodney found himself getting to his feet.

"The weapons Chair still has some drone warheads," he muttered. "Major Sheppard will...uh...need some help..." His voice tailed off and he scuttled out of there, eyes fixed firmly on his boots.

He loved this city and he loved the people in it, although he wouldn't admit that to them of course. If the worst came to the worst, then Elizabeth would order the self-destruct rather than surrender Atlantis into the hands of the Wraith, and then this city, this beautiful city, and all the knowledge of the Ancients, would be lost to them forever – to say nothing of the fact that they'd all die with it. Rodney felt his pace quicken until he was running. He ran full pelt back to the weapons room, skidded straight through the door, and came to a halt, breathing hard. Major Sheppard was already seated on the Chair, and he glanced around as Rodney made his entrance.

"Glad you could make it," he said.

"Oh this? I wouldn't miss this for the world," Rodney bantered back. Sheppard gave him a quick smile, those hazel eyes of his easily penetrating Rodney's mirage of bravado – then an expression of total concentration took over his features and Rodney ran over to his screen, in time to see the warheads Sheppard had unleashed make their way towards the Wraith ships. They wouldn't be enough though. He knew that, and Sheppard knew it too.

"That's it. Last ones," Sheppard said. Rodney nodded, and went slowly back over to the door.

"Rodney?" Sheppard said behind him, a worried tone in his voice. Rodney shut the door, and then locked it and turned back to face the erstwhile Lord Protector. John looked tired, he thought, and there was a smudge of a bruise on his right temple. Rodney wondered how he'd got that, and the thought made him blaze angrily inside.

"So, Major. How do we do this?" Rodney asked, amazed by how calm his voice sounded when compared to the sensation of total panic in his stomach. "I mean...you have to sit in the Chair, obviously, so I'm not sure where I should go exactly. The Chair isn't huge...not designed for two...although actually it IS designed for two so we just have to find a way to fit..."

"Rodney, just shut up and come here," Sheppard ordered. Rodney felt relieved that someone seemed to be in charge, and he responded to the firm tone in Sheppard's voice by going to stand, stupidly, beside the Chair. "Sit down," Sheppard ordered, grabbing Rodney's wrist and pulling him down to perch beside him on the Chair. The Chair immediately started to hum, and lit up an even deeper shade of blue.

"From the way the Chair is responding, it looks like Doctor Beckett's genetic analysis might actually be correct. Astonishing," Rodney said, unsure where to put his hands to keep himself from falling off his perch.

"Idiot," Sheppard said fondly. "Did you ever doubt it?"

"Well...no," Rodney admitted reluctantly. "It did seem pretty conclusive – between that and that bloody hologram."

"Yeah." Sheppard gave a small chuckle, his gaze fixed firmly on Rodney in a way that made Rodney's skin feel hot.

"So...I'm aware that there's a time issue here," Rodney muttered. "How do you want to do this? Should we...uh...undress? I'm not sure if that's entirely necessary. I mean I'm sure we could achieve this quite comfortably – perhaps more comfortably – if we were to remain fully clothed. Well almost fully...And we should probably just go straight to the point. No need for unnecessary intimacy, like kissing for ex..."

He was interrupted in this train of thought by Sheppard putting his hands on his cheeks, pulling him forward, and kissing him firmly on the mouth. Rodney hung there, feeling his blood fizz from the tips of his toes to the roots of his hair. Sheppard's mouth was unexpectedly soft and eager, and he worked Rodney's lips open expertly with his own, and then started kissing him in earnest, his tongue exploring every single inch of Rodney's mouth.

"Uh, okay. We'll kiss then. Kissing's good," Rodney whimpered when Sheppard released him.

"Relax," Sheppard said, his hand soothing Rodney's arm gently. "You're like a coiled spring."

"I'm scared!" Rodney admitted.

"Of me?" Sheppard gave a little laugh, his hand still gently rubbing Rodney's arm.

"No...of this...of us...of sex!" Rodney said, way beyond trying to hold onto any aspect of his pride. Sheppard gazed at him steadily. "I mean, come on...have you ever...with a guy before?" Rodney asked.

"As a matter of fact, yes," Sheppard told him. "I've been pretty exploratory in my time. I like sex, Rodney."

"Well so do I!" Rodney countered. "I think," he added, frowning.

"Do you mean...are you telling me that you've never actually had sex, Rodney?" Sheppard asked, raising an eyebrow.

"You mean with anyone other than myself?" Rodney swallowed hard, keeping his gaze fixed firmly on his boots. This was one of those dark secrets he had never intended to share with anyone, and he dreaded the look of pity and ridicule he expected to see in Sheppard's eyes.

"Hey..." Sheppard's fingers gripped his chin and lifted it gently to meet his gaze, and when he looked up Rodney found only fond curiosity in those hazel eyes. "That's okay. In fact," Sheppard grinned, "it's kind of a turn-on."

"Really?" Rodney frowned.

"Yeah." Sheppard sat back in the Chair and loosened his belt a little. Rodney swallowed hard again. Having got himself comfortable, Sheppard reached out and smoothed his hand through Rodney's hair. "So how come? A good-looking guy like you. How did you manage to avoid sex for all these years?" Sheppard said, his hand causing sparks of molten electricity to spark up and down Rodney's spine."

"Oh please, Major. I may be God's gift to science, but I don't pretend I'm anything special in the looks department," Rodney snorted.

"Really? I always thought you were kind of cute," Sheppard said, his eyes fixed firmly on Rodney's mouth.

"What?" Rodney began, but his astonishment was kissed away as Major Sheppard pulled him down for another long, deep kiss. This one was even sweeter than the last, and when finally Sheppard released him, Rodney hung there, his lips slightly apart, moaning softly to himself.

"Yeah. Cute," Sheppard said. "I like brainy guys – you've got that geek chic thing going on."

"Oh for god's sake!" Rodney got to his feet, jolted out of the moment by what he saw as Sheppard's obvious attempts to be nice to him. "Geek chic? That's very kind of you, Major but you and I both know that the only reason you're here right now, with me, doing that clever thing you do with your mouth, is because if you don't the city will explode. So let's just get undressed and get on with it." He began tearing off his shirt angrily. "It's kind of like a version of the pity fuck although this'll be more like a survival fuck. They're all waiting for us to get on with it, and I think that's what we should do. We'll just fuck, save the city, and then get dressed and never talk about this again."

"No." Sheppard got up, and the Chair's lights faded immediately. Rodney stood there, bare-chested, feeling suddenly ridiculously stupid and exposed. "I won't do it your way, Rodney – I can't be that soulless - so you're going to have to do it my way or we don't do this at all," Sheppard told him, placing his hands on Rodney's bare back. Rodney shivered and nearly jumped out of his skin as Sheppard's hands burned his flesh.

"I thought you were supposed to be the Lord Protector – I thought you were supposed to want to save the city and the people at any cost?" Rodney muttered bitterly, trying to ignore those firm, warm hands on his shoulders.

"And I thought you were supposed to be the Lord Devoter," Sheppard said, his voice suspiciously close to Rodney's ear. His mouth nuzzled Rodney's neck, warm and inviting. "Dedicated to my personal happiness at all times."

"That is SO unfair!" Rodney began, turning around to argue, but when he did so Sheppard caught him up in his arms and kissed him again. Rodney struggled, briefly, but Sheppard was much stronger than him, and besides, the Major's kisses were making the blood rush away from his head and in another direction entirely. The kiss finished, and Rodney hung there weakly in Sheppard's arms. "I'm not fooling myself, Major," Rodney told him. "I'm not exactly...alluring, and this whole plan kind of depends on you being able to...uh, perform, so this whole thing is probably doomed to disaster."

"That's why you wanted to keep this so cold and clinical? Because you thought I wouldn't get off on you and it'd hurt more if you were really into it? Rodney – trust me, you really don't have to worry about that. You turn me on. Look." Sheppard took hold of Rodney's hand and directed it to the front of his pants. Rodney gave a little gasp of surprise to find that the Major was not only well on his way to being rock hard, but also that he was very impressively endowed.

"Okay now?" Sheppard asked, stealing another kiss from Rodney's willing mouth. Rodney wondered if there was some kind of special pheromone in Sheppard's kisses because it seemed to him that each time they kissed, Rodney became less and less able to think straight.

"Okay," he muttered, wanting another kiss.

"Good...then come here." John pulled Rodney over to the Chair, sat back down again, and pulled Rodney on top of him. The Chair started to glow and hum again, but Rodney felt

stupid, ungainly and clumsy, perched awkwardly on the Major's legs and torso.

"What should I do?" he asked, unsure where to put his hands, and anxious not to completely squash the Major.

"Well, if you could just relax, that'd be a start," Sheppard said, with one of those lazy half grins of his. His hands slid down the back of Rodney's pants and began stroking Rodney's ass.

"Oh my god!" Rodney moaned. "Oh shit!"

"Good?" Sheppard asked, his hands continuing their insistent stroking.

"I think so," Rodney managed to squeeze out, closing his eyes tightly, and trying to relax. It actually felt too good. It felt so good he wanted to lie here forever. Sheppard pulled him down so that he was lying in a more relaxed position, chest to chest, and then he started kissing Rodney again. Rodney floated away on a haze of pleasure as Sheppard's mouth plundered his, and Sheppard's hands caressed his bottom. This felt too good – far better than he could ever have imagined in his wildest fantasies. Sheppard kissed him long and hard for what felt like forever, until Rodney finally started to relax, his body melting into the Major's.

"Okay," Sheppard said, finally pulling back. "I need you to be more...naked," he said, keeping his hands on Rodney's ass so the science officer couldn't panic again.

"Okay," Rodney agreed, uncertainly. "Did you bring...um...are there things we need?" he asked.

"Taken care of." Sheppard patted his jacket pocket.

"Oh...one small thing," Rodney said, putting his scientist hat back on again. "No condoms."

"Hmm?"

"It's a technology thing. I think it kind of needs flesh on flesh in order to work properly." Rodney gestured with his head to the Chair, which was now humming loudly and glowing an intense shade of electric blue.

"No problem," Sheppard said, his lips slightly swollen from kissing, his dark hair tousled, and those lazy eyes of his dark with arousal. Rodney felt his own already half-hard cock harden even more in appreciation of the sight. "Are you okay with that?" Sheppard asked. "Because I'm guessing that as I'm going to be working the beam, that I have to be lying back...which means there's only one way we can do this," he said carefully.

Rodney swallowed hard. "I had figured that out for myself, Major," he said in a strangled kind of voice.

"You've really gotta call me John if we're going to have hot sex, Rodney."

"John. Right. Okay. John." Rodney nodded fiercely.

"This isn't ideal – it's not the way I'd normally do things on a first time, but we're kind of out of options this time around," Sheppard said.

"Understood, Major," Rodney replied stiffly. "Uh, John," he added as an afterthought.

"So, are you removing those pants or am I doing it for you?" Sheppard asked with a grin.

"No... I'm doing it," Rodney said, flushing a bright shade of pink. He took a deep breath, undid his belt, shoved his pants and briefs down to his ankles, and then realised he hadn't taken off his boots so he hopped around in an ungainly fashion for several seconds until he had finally managed to remove every single article of clothing and then turned to Major Sheppard again, feeling not only stupid, but also extremely self-conscious now that he was naked. He needn't have worried – Sheppard had been busy getting naked himself, and when Rodney turned around he was completely nude – and sporting a very large erection. Rodney found himself gazing at it, dumbfounded, and completely forgot his own embarrassment.

"I want you – now," Sheppard said, grabbing Rodney's wrist and pulling him back down on him again. Rodney went very willingly, and dared to lean in for a kiss of his own, which Sheppard was all too eager to oblige him with. Rodney could feel the heat of skin on skin, and his cock throbbed insistently. He shifted, and their cocks touched, sending a jolt of pure, molten pleasure through Rodney's body.

"Oh god..." he moaned.

"I need you...closer..." Sheppard said, his hands clasping Rodney firmly, until they were stretched full length on the Chair together. Rodney still felt clumsy and awkward but Sheppard seemed to know exactly what he was doing, and his hands wandered everywhere, arousing Rodney beyond endurance but staying well clear of his cock, as if aware that if he touched him there Rodney wouldn't be able to hold on.

"Please...you've got to...soon..." Rodney said, unable to articulate what he wanted, not really *sure* what he wanted.

"You ready?" Sheppard asked.

"Yes," he whimpered, burying his head down the side of Sheppard's neck. He heard a popping sound, and then a slicking sound, and then Sheppard's cool, lubed fingers circled around the rim of his anus. "Oh shit," Rodney panted, burying his head further into the Major's neck. Sheppard grasped him firmly across the waist with one hand, while sliding one finger from the other deep inside Rodney. "Oh god...that feels so good," Rodney whimpered, kissing the Major's hair, and blindly running his fingertips across Sheppard's nipples. Sheppard laughed, and turned his face to kiss Rodney's adam's apple. Rodney swallowed convulsively, and gave another gasp as he felt two fingers push inside him.

Sheppard certainly knew what he was doing, as he expertly finger-fucked Rodney for several long minutes, and then two fingers became three, and Rodney found himself rocking in time to that insistent caress. His cock felt so hard he thought it might explode. How had he ever thought that solo sex could be anywhere near as good as the real thing? This was like something out of a different galaxy – quite literally – astonishing that he'd had to come all the way to the Pegasus galaxy in order to finally get laid. That thought made him laugh, and Sheppard pulled him close, removed his fingers and pressed his lips against Rodney's laughing mouth.

"Good huh?" he asked, as they laughed and kissed at the same time.

"Wonderful," Rodney sighed.

"Okay...then I need you to trust me here, Rodney. I'm going to guide you...okay?"

"Yes...yes, John...okay," Rodney said, suddenly aware that he trusted the other man implicitly. Sheppard adjusted their position so that Rodney was now squatting over his erect penis. Rodney reached out and touched it, almost reverently, longing to feel the meaty hardness in his hands. Sheppard shuddered and sighed in response and thus emboldened, Rodney lowered his head and gently licked the crown. Sheppard gasped, and reached out to grab Rodney's hips. "Do that again and we'll have to start all over!" he said, raising his head and listening to the overhead bombardment. "And I don't think the city has that kind of time," he added, reminding Rodney why they were here.

"Okay...I'm ready," Rodney said, his eyes fixed determinedly on Sheppard's smiling, sweat-sheened face.

"Okay..." Sheppard grasped his hips and placed him over his own erect cock, and then he slid his hands back and slowly pried Rodney's buttocks apart, guiding Rodney into position. Rodney moaned as he felt the slick, hard penis press insistently against his anus. Much as he wanted to feel that hard cock inside him, he wasn't sure he'd be able to just impale himself on it. It was too much to ask – he was too inexperienced to process all the sensations he was feeling, and he felt sure he was going to fail. "Stay with me, Rodney," Sheppard said urgently. "This'll be good. You just have to trust me. Do you trust me?"

"Yes," Rodney replied weakly.

"Good...okay.. here we go." Sheppard grasped Rodney's hips again, and then, unexpectedly ground his hips up, causing his cock to glide slickly into Rodney's ass. Rodney gasped, feeling invaded, the sensation making him feel full, and burning him, and for a moment he struggled to rise up, but Sheppard's hands were grasping his hips too tight, and then...then...the skies seemed to open and his brain was full of white light as Sheppard's cock hit some place, deep inside him, that made angels sing in his mind, and reduced Rodney to a quivering mass of pleasure. He hung there for a moment, eyes wide open in shock, and then saw the expression on Sheppard's face. The Major was smiling, knowing that he'd hit a point of nirvana deep inside Rodney's body, and Rodney smiled back, blinking in disbelief at how good this felt.

Now instinct took over, and he found himself rising up and down on Sheppard's cock, slowing impaling himself, up and down, hitting that sweet spot deep inside with each inward thrust. Then Sheppard took hold of his cock, and Rodney thought he'd gone into some kind of spasm. Surely sex wasn't supposed to be *this* good? he thought to himself, and what the hell was that sound? Glancing down, he realised it was the Chair, humming loud enough to drown out all other sounds, and he was dimly aware that the Chair was pulsing too, in time to each thrust and stroke, and not only the Chair – the entire room – in fact, Rodney realised, with a deep flush of embarrassment, it was probably the entire base. That realisation wasn't enough to stop him though, as he continued to rise and fall on Sheppard's cock, feeling the pleasure zing deep inside his body with each motion. Now they had become one, the Major's body fitting perfectly inside his own, the Major's hand sending shudders of pure molten sensation through every nerve ending in his body as he expertly massaged Rodney's cock.

Then the roof was opening, and he could see the sky, and the Wraith ships bombarding them from far above, their missiles bouncing off the shield, creating a massive cosmic fireworks display which couldn't even begin to compete with the fireworks inside his own body. Now the Chair seemed to be on fire, burning bright blue, and a column of pure energy had arisen from its depths, and shot straight into the night sky. It burned through the shield from the inside out, and was effortlessly zapping Wraith ships right out of the sky. Sheppard's eyes were still locked with Rodney's, and their bodies still rocked tightly as one, as that energy beam sliced through the sky, leaving explosion after explosion in its wake. Rodney felt as if he was one with John Sheppard, at one with that great beam slicing through the sky, at one with this pulsing blue room, at one with the entire Atlantis base, connected to it all by some kind of Ancient genetic link, and then his entire body was convulsing, shaking, as he felt himself starting to come. He came all over Sheppard's hand, all over his chest, and even splattered the walls of the room, and still Sheppard's hand was moving in rhythmic time, and Sheppard's cock was claiming him deep inside...and then the world seemed to explode, and Rodney found himself falling...only to find John ready and waiting to catch him, his arms going round Rodney's body, and pulling him close.

He lay there for what felt like eternity, panting hard, his head resting on John's chest, his hands clutching John's shoulders while John's fingers gently soothed him, and he felt the soft kisses the other man was depositing on his hair.

Finally he came to, and glanced up into John's warm, affectionate eyes.

"How are you feeling?" John asked.

"I don't know..." Rodney's voice sounded like a croak to his own ears. "Did we win?" he asked, looking up, but the beam had disappeared and the roof was once more intact overhead.

"Oh yeah," John laughed. "We zapped 'em right out of the sky."

They lay there for a few more minutes, until Rodney started to feel cold...and kind of

uncomfortable. Now that the city was safe, and the sexual urgency had gone from the situation, he was feeling kind of embarrassed. Was he really lying here on Major Sheppard's hairy chest, both of them butt naked after just engaging in the kind of mind-blowing sexual activity he'd never imagined even existed before now? And, oh god...did everyone in the control room know what they'd just done? Beckett, Teyla and Elizabeth certainly did...oh god. The embarrassment was excruciating. Now that the immediacy of the situation had passed, Rodney was just left feeling utterly out of his depth, like a fish stranded on shore, flopping around and panting for air. He took a deep intake of breath...and John shifted underneath him.

"Ow. I think my arm went to sleep," he complained. Rodney got up quickly, as if stung, and half-clambered, half-fell off of the Chair.

"My apologies, Major," he said stiffly, searching around desperately for his clothes. He found them in a messy, discarded heap on the floor and began hastily pulling them on.

"That's better." John stood up, flicking his wrist as he did so to release the tension from his squashed arm. He collected his clothes and slowly got dressed, casting little glances in Rodney's direction as he did so – which Rodney ignored. Now that it was all over, he hadn't a clue how to react – he just wanted to run away as quickly as possible. Rodney was half-way to the door by the time Sheppard was done, and he was just about to reach out and unlock it when there was a tiny, timid tap on it, which made him jump and leap a step backwards.

"Uh, who is it?" he yelped.

"It's Elizabeth. It's been awhile since what remained of the Wraith fleet turned tail and ran and I thought I should find out if you're both okay," she said in anxious tones.

Rodney glanced at John, who was striding towards him, looking no more than mildly ruffled after the tumultuous events that had just unfolded in this room. Rodney had no idea how on earth he did that. He knew his own hair had to be sticking out all over the place, and he suspected his face was shining with both sweat and embarrassment right now.

"We're fine. Perfectly fine." Rodney drew on every single ounce of self-preservation he had in his armoury, gathered it to him, stood up straight, and unlocked the door.

"Hold on, Rodney," John said, putting a hand on his shoulder. Rodney shrugged him off.

"I think we're done here, Major," he said tersely, grabbing at the door.

"No, Rodney hang on, your shirt..." John began, but, too late, Rodney wrenched the door open and found himself face to face with the startled, curious, expectant and somewhat freaked out faces of Elizabeth, Teyla and Beckett...and when he looked down he realised he'd put his shirt on inside out.

"I think that about does it, yes," he muttered to nobody in particular. "Doctor Weir, Teyla,

Dr Beckett," he nodded pleasantly. "Job accomplished, city saved...I'll be applying for a transfer from Atlantis as soon as it can be arranged. Thank you. Now I will..." He was unable to complete the sentence and instead just stalked off back to his quarters.

Silence. Blessed silence. Rodney sat down on the side of his bed, and then jumped up again with a yelp as he realised his ass was sore. "Damn," he muttered. "Damn, damn, damn." What had just happened? What did it mean? And, more to the point, what happened next? He had no idea. He'd never had to face difficult sexual emotions before and he had no idea where to start.

He tore off his clothes, got into the shower, washed all the sweat and various other sticky substances from his body, and then pulled on some sweats, lay down on the bed, and gazed blankly at the ceiling. He had no idea how long he lay there, but after some time there was a firm little knock at the door.

"Go away!" he yelled.

"No." John's voice. When had he started thinking of him as 'John' and not 'Major Sheppard'? Probably right about the time he stuck his cock up your ass, Rodney, he told himself. Formalities seemed inappropriate in those circumstances.

"I'm not here," he shouted at the closed door.

"I could open the door," John replied.

"It's locked," Rodney told the door.

"The city pretty much lets me go wherever I want," John said, in an apologetic tone.

"Yes, this whole damn city just loves its Lord Protector," Rodney snapped.

"So, I'm coming in, whether you like it or not," John replied after a few seconds more of silence. Rodney got up, just in time, as John opened the door, walked through it, and it closed after him.

John had changed into a dark crimson shirt, which he was wearing over a pair of jeans. Rodney wasn't sure he'd ever seen him dressed so casually before, and he had to admit, he really liked the look. "I thought you needed some time alone to figure things out, but now – time's up," John told him.

Rodney just stood there, mutely staring at him.

"We wiped out most of the Wraith ships," John said. "I thought you'd want to know."

"Marvellous. Is that all?"

"A handful of them managed to get away but I figure that's a good thing because they'll be able to tell the rest of them that we have an invincible weapon and hopefully that'll keep them away from here for good."

"Well that's great. Hoorah," Rodney said mirthlessly. "Now if that's everything..."

"No it isn't. We need to talk."

"We really don't," Rodney snapped.

"Yes. We do," John insisted. "You can't be serious about requesting a transfer off Atlantis."

"I don't think my career decisions are any of your business, Major," Rodney said sharply.

"I didn't say that. I'm just saying you can't leave because of this – because of what we just did," John told him insistently.

"I don't think there's any reason to talk about that – it was something we had to do to save the city and now the city's all nicely saved so we can forget it happened," Rodney growled.

"Well, until the Wraith return again," John said softly.

"I'm sure we'll have figured out another method of defence by then," Rodney told him, turning away and grabbing a holdall from his closet. "Now, if you'll excuse me, Major – I have some packing to do."

"I don't believe you really want to leave," John said softly, placing a hand on Rodney's arm. Rodney felt another of those sparks of electricity shoot through his entire body, straight to his groin, and he flinched and pulled away. "You can feel it too," John said. "I've never experienced anything like it – it makes me want to touch you the whole time."

"That's another reason why I can't stay, Major," Rodney said, in a broken voice. "I'm clearly not going to be able to work with you when I want to..." He hesitated, seeing John in his mind's eye, naked and dishevelled and looking utterly beautiful, and it was all he could do not to turn around and pull the other man into his arms.

"Want to what, Rodney?" John asked.

"It doesn't matter. It's clearly absurd. It wouldn't be workable at all."

"The Ancients pretty much designed it to be workable," John pointed out.

"The Ancients don't rule our damn lives!" Rodney growled. "Our society is completely different to theirs, and what might have worked 10,000 years ago doesn't necessarily stand a hope in hell of working now! I know this isn't what you'd have chosen if they'd given you a choice, Major. I can't possibly be your choice of ideal mate, and there is no way you really

want me around, so the whole thing would just end up being...humiliating."

"What makes you think I wouldn't want you, Rodney?" John asked quietly.

"Because!" Rodney turned angrily. "Because we really have nothing in common, and god knows what the rest of the base would think, and I'm not your type, and this whole conversation is absurd!"

"What do you think my type is?" John asked in a curious tone.

"Someone female, someone pretty...someone less...temperamental," Rodney said with a wry laugh. "Come now, Major, don't make me list all my flaws. Until today I had no idea that I had any, let alone how many there are!"

"I already told you I've experimented in my time," John replied. "And you have no idea what my type is; I may not be as obvious as you think I am. And while I wouldn't describe you as pretty exactly, you are definitely cute, in a weird, quirky way. You've got beautiful blue eyes, a very nice butt, and the kind of attitude that makes me want to swat you one minute and kiss you the next - and none of that matters anyway."

"Why not?" Rodney frowned, still reeling a little from finding out that John thought he had beautiful blue eyes.

"Because you make me laugh," John told him with a grin. "When you walk into the room, I know I'm going to have a good time. You said we have nothing in common but I think you're wrong – we spark off each other, Rodney. Even when we're not laughing, I know I can just hang out with you, and feel comfortable. We just...kind of get along. You must have noticed that, Rodney."

"We argue a lot," Rodney reminded him.

"We snipe – it's fun," John grinned. "I never liked the quiet life in any case. Besides, I like the way your mind works."

"It *is* a very fine mind," Rodney mused.

"Yeah, and the arrogance – such an attractive trait," John laughed.

"It's not arrogance when you really are cleverer than everyone else," Rodney replied sternly.

"Yeah, yeah...now, will you stay?"

"As what? Your concubine?" Rodney asked.

"Well, not exactly, but you have to admit that the sex was pretty damn good," John said with a grin. Rodney flushed again at that thought – he'd been trying not to think about the sex ever since he had returned to his quarters. If he thought about the sex, and how 'pretty

damn good' it had been, then he doubted he'd be able to think clearly.

"And the base?" he asked. "I bet they're talking about us already. In fact I'm sure word of what we just did has spread all around the base like wildfire. I'll be laughed at wherever I go."

"For what? Saving the city? I doubt it. It's true that all the people that remained behind have a pretty good idea what happened, and we can't exactly stop them telling all the others when they return but I'm cool about it..."

"Well I'm not!" Rodney interrupted. "I can't live like this. It's just not me! Now please...please leave, John."

He said it softly, desperately, and he couldn't keep the note of begging out of his voice. John stood there for a moment, and then sighed.

"Rodney, don't make this mistake," he said quietly. Rodney didn't reply, just turned his back, grabbed a handful of clothes from his closet, and continued packing. John stood there for a moment, and then, with another sigh, he turned and left the room.

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Rodney didn't stop until he had packed up everything he owned. It felt much easier to be doing something than thinking about this whole mess. He wondered if it would be possible to get to the gate without meeting anyone on the way. He'd have to speak to Elizabeth of course, but he was sure she'd understand, and arrange for him to be gated away privately. That would be the best thing for all concerned.

Rodney felt suddenly completely exhausted, utterly wrung out by all the emotions he had experienced over the past 24 hours, and he collapsed on his bed. How long had it been since he'd had a decent night's sleep he wondered? At least once he got back to Earth he'd be able to sleep again. And it'd be much easier without having to see Major Sheppard every day. He'd sleep much easier knowing he wouldn't have to face that constant reminder of... he felt his face flush as he remembered rocking shamelessly up and down on John's cock, moaning and screaming with pleasure. Rodney closed his eyes and tried resolutely not to think about John's cock or any other part of John's body, but somehow, when he tried to switch off and sleep, all he could see were John's hazel eyes, smouldering in the darkness, inviting and bewitching.

"Stop it!" he growled, grabbing a pillow and holding it over his head to try and stop the images, but it didn't work. He flung the pillow aside, got up, stalked over to the window and gazed out. Damn but he loved this city of the Ancients! He loved this view over the peaceful waters of Atlantis, and he loved the hum of the city around him. He loved both the beauty and intelligence of the place, and the intellectual challenges she offered him, and, most of all, he loved...most of all he loved...most of all he loved John Sheppard.

Rodney rested his hot forehead against the cool window as he made peace with that

realisation. He'd never been in love before – who knew it could be this confusing? He was feeling something else though, as he stood by the window gazing out. That queasy sensation in his gut that had been keeping him awake for so many weeks was back and he tried to track down its source. He just had the sense of something being in the wrong place, and it manifested itself as a constant nagging ache in the pit of his belly. Last night he had thought maybe what he was sensing was danger from the Wraith, but now he realised it wasn't that at all.

"It's not something out of place...it's someone," he murmured. "No...not someone...not just *anyone*...it's me. *I'm* in the wrong place. No wonder I've been finding it so hard to sleep in this room."

This realisation hit him without any sense of surprise. He knew what he had to do now. He squared his shoulders, grabbed his packed bag, and left without a backward glance.

The city was humming quietly as he walked down the corridor. This should have been harder, he thought to himself as he walked, but it wasn't – it was easy. In fact, it might very well be the easiest thing he'd ever done. The city seemed to be pulsing again he realised as he walked. It had a faint reddish tinge that he'd never noticed before. He reached the end of the corridor and turned right, noticing that the queasiness in his stomach seemed to ease slightly with every step. John's quarters were at the end of the corridor and he didn't stop as he neared them...he didn't need to. This city knew where he was meant to be, and it had been trying to tell him for weeks; it sure as hell wasn't about to deny him entrance now. The door swished open the moment he got close to it and he strode inside, suddenly feeling almost jaunty. The lights were dim, and John was lying in bed, wide awake, and looking, Rodney thought, invitingly naked. He sat up as Rodney came in, a quizzical expression on his face.

"Move over," Rodney said, dumping his bag on the ground and stripping off his clothes in the blink of an eye.

"What? First you were walking out on me and now you're moving *in* with me?" John said, glancing at the bulging holdall and then back to Rodney.

"I'm an impulsive man, John. You'd better get used to it," Rodney warned. "I really have no idea why this city seems to think I'm meant to be with you, but who am I to fight against genetics? Personally I think we'll drive each other insane but..."

"Oh just shut up," John said, pulling him under the sheets, and wrapping his arms around him.

Rodney lay there for a moment, blinking, confused. Who knew that being held by a pair of strong arms could feel so nice? He sighed and relaxed, pressing himself against John's naked body. They were both too tired to do anything but snuggle, but, Rodney decided, snuggling had a lot to be said for it; in fact, he thought he might very easily become addicted to snuggling.

"Just to be clear on a few things," he said, clearing his throat. "I will not, under any circumstances, be calling you 'My Lord Protector' except in an entirely derisory and derogatory context."

"Understood," John said, kissing his hair. "I, in turn, will only call you "My Lord Devoter" when I want to really annoy you."

"That sounds perfectly acceptable," Rodney said, moving his face so that their lips met. They kissed for a long time, sweetly, deeply, until Rodney's head was swimming.

"What about what people will say?" John asked when he released him.

"I'm sure I'll be able to shut them up with the power of my biting wit," Rodney replied.

"I'm sure you will," John agreed.

"I won't change," Rodney warned as he nuzzled the side of John's jaw with his lips.

"Neither will I," John replied.

"We'll argue the whole time," Rodney said.

"Mmm, and have great make-up sex after," John reminded him.

"All the available evidence suggests to me that I'm in love with you," Rodney added.

"Well that's good, because I've noticed your hypotheses are rarely wrong," John replied. "And it must be said in return that I love you too."

"Really?" Rodney looked up, startled, his heart leaping excitedly in his chest.

"Of course. Idiot. I've been trying to tell you that for the past few hours but you weren't listening," John said, squeezing him gently against his chest.

Rodney lay there, feeling warm, utterly happy, and more than a little bit drowsy and he closed his eyes contentedly, enjoying the sensation of being held, and having John's hands brush lightly across his naked skin. Somehow he knew that he wouldn't have any trouble sleeping tonight. The queasy sensation in his stomach had disappeared completely, and he was left instead with a sense that everything was in the right place. Everything was very much where it should be – no, *he* was where he should be – sleeping peacefully in John's arms, where he belonged.

The End

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